they shed upon the beliefs of the writers and their contemporaries,

Many catalogues of existing works have been produced, usually in the form of lists of private or imperial collections, which possess great value for the historian.

Much of the historical writing of the past was of excellent quality, even when judged by the exacting standards of modern scholarship. On the other hand, a large proportion of it was of lesser worth. The student of China's history, therefore, is confronted by an embarrassment of riches. His plight is made worse by the absence of adequate guides through the huge maze. Indices and other implements indispensable to him who would find all the material pertinent to a given subject are largely lacking. Since each generation tends to write history from its own standpoint, to a historiographer of our times much of the information contained even in the standard works seems trivial and uninteresting and the number of volumes which must be gone through to glean what is germane to one's special interest is often discouraging. To huge masses, too, must be applied the tests for accuracy and dependability without which no writing can be done that will satisfy the historical conscience. All this prodigious body of records, then, is at once the despair and the joy of the scholar.

The Chinese have what they call *lei shu,* often rather loosely translated as "encyclopaedias." Some cover only a limited range of subjects, such as the origin and history of family names, and others embrace the entire scope of Chinese knowledge. Usually instead of being, like Western encyclopaedias, made up of articles written especially for them, the *lei shu* are composed of longer or shorter excerpts from existing works. Some *lei shu* have at-

tained huge proportions. The largest was the *Yung Lo Ta Tien*—although it is said not to fall under the *lei shu* in the strictest sense of that term. It was compiled by order of the third Emperor of the Ming, ran to nearly twelve thousand volumes (each, moreover, in two separate fascicles) and, since the expense of printing was discouraging even to the exchequer of one of the most powerful and energetic rulers of China's history, it existed only in three manuscript copies, now represented by a few widely scattered folios. Others of the *lei shu* were printed, and some of these were very voluminous. Often they have preserved more or less extensive fragments of works which except for them have entirely